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JIMMY CARTER
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If only Walter Cronkite had bestowed his blessing five years earlier, Jimmy Carter lamented Friday.

The dean of network anchors said last week Carter was the smartest president he has known in his long career.

"I appreciate very much what Walter Cronkite said," Carter told an audience at the Minnesota Press Club. "I only wish he would have said it while I was in the White House and he was on the evening news.

"What I remember most vividly is him saying, 'This is the 110th day of the hostage crisis in Iran...'"

That crisis, Carter said ruefully, knocked him out of the White House.

"Had the hostage situation been averted or had the hostages returned home in the summer of 1980," he said, "I think I would have been re-elected."

Had he been re-elected, he said, there are a few things he would have done differently than Ronald Reagan, especially in the area of foreign affairs.

"I think President Reagan's position (on Nicaragua) has been damaging to democracy in this hemisphere," he said. "He has made it so that many people in that area consider the Sandinistas to be like David and the United States like Goliath."

The Reagan-approved CIA mining of Nicaraguan waters, Carter added,
"bordered on, or maybe exceeded, the bounds of legality."

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EXCERPTED